

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5886
LARRY LESUER/WASHINGTON

JUNE 2, 1978

FOCUS: SENATOR JAMES ALLEN

ANNCR:

U.S. SENATOR JAMES ALLEN OF ALABAMA -- AN OUTSTANDING SOUTHERN CONSERVATIVE LAWMAKER WHOSE DEBATING SKILLS MADE HIM A MAJOR LEGISLATIVE POWER -- IS DEAD AT AGE SIXTY-FIVE. VOA'S LARRY LESUEUR PREPARED THIS PROFILE.

VOICE:

SENATOR ALLEN WAS PERHAPS BEST-KNOWN AROUND THE COUNTRY AS THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION TO RATIFICATION OF THE TWO PANAMA CANAL TREATIES THE SENATE APPROVED EARLIER THIS YEAR. AND THE ALABAMA SENATOR WAS ACKNOWLEDGED BY HIS COLLEAGUES AS PEERLESS IN THE ART OF FILIBUSTERING -- OR TRYING TO TALK TO DEATH CONTROVERSIAL PROPOSALS.

AS A SENATOR FOR TEN YEARS FROM THE SOUTHERN STATE OF ALABAMA, SENATOR ALLEN QUICKLY EMERGED DURING HIS FIRST TERM AS A MASTER OF THE SENATE TRADITION OF ALMOST UNLIMITED DEBATE -- A PRACTICE LONG USED BY SOUTHERN LEGISLATORS AS A MINORITY SHIELD AGAINST THE VOTING POWER OF THE NORTH.

WITH THE CHANGING TIMES, SENATOR ALLEN, A CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRAT, USED HIS ENCYCLOPEDIC KNOWLEDGE OF SENATE RULES AND PROCEDURES TO DELAY LIBERAL LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES HE OPPOSED. HE SOMETIMES UTILIZED ADROIT TIMING, DELAYING MATTERS TOWARD THE END OF A CONGRESSIONAL SESSION IN ORDER TO HOLD THE FLOOR AGAINST CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION UNTIL THE SENATE ABANDONED IT.

SENATOR ALLEN DID NOT HAVE A PARTICULAR IMPRESSIVE VOICE. IN FACT, IT WAS SOMEWHAT HIGH-PITCHED FOR SO BIG A MAN. YET HIS TENACITY AND SKILL AT MANIPULATING THE SENATE RULES MADE HIM A REDOUBTABLE DEBATER. HE COULD SPEAK FOR HOURS WITHOUT A WRITTEN TEXT.

"I DON'T FEEL THE MAJORITY IS ALWAYS RIGHT," SENATOR ALLEN ONCE SAID, EXPLAINING HIS POSITION, "THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE MAJORITY CAN TRAMPLE THE MINORITY."

SENATOR ALLEN WAS OFTEN SOUGHT AFTER BY DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS ALIKE TO ACT AS UNOFFICIAL LEADER OF SOME OF THE SENATE'S KALEIDOSCOPIC MINORITY GROUPINGS. EVEN SENATE OPPONENTS -- COLLEAGUES HE SOMETIMES TRAPPED IN SENATE RULES -- ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE WAS ALWAYS FAIR, CALM AND UNFAILINGLY COURTEOUS. FOR EXAMPLE, VICE PRESIDENT NELSON ROCKEFELLER, WHILE PRESIDING OVER THE SENATE, ONCE MADE A PUBLIC APOLOGY TO SENATOR ALLEN FOR NOT RECOGNIZING MR. ALLEN'S RIGHT OF REJOINDER. AND A SOMETIME OPPONENT, LIBERAL DEMOCRAT EDWARD KENNEDY, SAID SENATOR ALLEN WAS PERHAPS THE GREATEST PARLIAMENTARIAN IN THE HISTORY OF THE U.S. SENATE.

WITH THE DEATH OF SENATOR JAMES ALLEN, PRESIDENT CARTER SAID THE SENATE HAS LOST "A MAN OF GREAT PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND A MASTER OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE."

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